

## **Education and Skill formation for economic development in Kenya**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The government of Kenya concern with the mismatch between education outcomes and the economic needs has led to several curriculum reviews but with little success. This article examines the factors that shape skill formation for economic development in Kenya. It draws on research carried out in Kenya to establish the global, national and local factors that shape skill formation for economic development in Kenya. The purpose of the study was to understand the mismatch between secondary education outcomes and the skill needs in the Kenyan economy. The study used the construct of skill formation as a conceptual framework. This framework takes into account the social, political and economic factors that influence the demand for and supply of skills. Key participants in this study were stakeholders in secondary education. The findings challenge some held assumptions about the relationship between education and economic activities in developing countries.

**Key words: Skill formation, social political factors, economic development, globalization, education**

### **I.0 Introduction**

Arguments about the mismatch between education and economic needs in Kenya have dominated education matters since independence. The increasing numbers of uneducated unemployed, the poverty level and the general poor economic development have been interpreted by others as symbolic of the whole education system and by some as lack of harmonization between education and economic factors in the country. Whatever the point of view, there is considerable political concern with the need to develop a skilled and adaptable work force to be able to compete in the international free market and to gear the school curriculum towards the notion of employability

(Republic of Kenya 2005). National policy papers such as (Report of Sector Review and Development, MOEST, 2003 and Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper 2005) produced by the government and its development partners link poor economic performance with lack of employability skills seen as the fault of schools. The government has undertaken several policy initiatives aimed at improving education outcomes to meet the economic needs of the country. .

A major policy initiative was the introduction of the 8+4+4 system of education in the 1980s (Republic of Kenya, 1981). The 8+4+4 as the current system of education is commonly known is a figurative term used to describe 8 years in primary, 4 years in secondary and 4 years of an ordinary degree at the university. However, more importantly, the 8+4+4 system features a broad school curriculum encompassing industrial and academic subjects ( Mwiria, 2002, Republic of Kenya, 2003). In secondary schooling the industrial subjects are a combination of theory and practice with the practical aspect forming an essential element of their teaching (ibid). Each subject has specific areas that should be emphasized depending on what is deemed as relevant to the Kenyan economy. The school programme is structured to give students opportunities to undertake practical activities to gain insights in the kind of economic opportunities available in the country. The efforts to introduce practical/industrial subjects in secondary school could be interpreted as a resolution by the government to provide students with experiences of practical world with a hope of inculcating the spirit of self reliance to reflect the economic realities in the country (Mwiria, 2002). It was expected that the broad secondary school curriculum would promote the values of practical work and give students insights about the nature of the Kenyan economy. If lack of employability skills was linked to schools, then introducing vocational subjects in the school was expected to bring about a difference in the labour market.

However, the relationship between schooling and employability is complex, often influenced by many factors. Schools are embedded in the society and what goes on in the society is likely to influence the schools outcomes. The social political, historical and economic factors that shape school outcomes are well documented (Aronowitz & Giroux, 19985, Okwach & Abagi, 2005). Notably however, although a lot of research has been conducted, the focus has been on the school programmes and the outcomes and how this affects economic development (see King 2007). It is rare that the social political and economic factors are taken into consideration. This may be indicative that such studies rely on theories such as human capital theory that sees a linear relationship between education and economic development. In this article, an alternative approach is proposed through the study of the factors that shape the demand for and supply of skills in Kenya. The study uses the construct of skill formation as a conceptual framework in order to analyse both the educational and extra-educational factors that shape the demand for and supply of skills for economic development.

Skill formation is described as the social capacity for learning and innovation (Brown, 2001). This means that the theory emphasise the societal factors that influence acquisition and application for skills. Using this approach, the study delves in the social political factors to analyse their effect on skill formation for economic development in Kenya. Based on the findings of the research, various factors that shape the demand for and supply of skills are categorised in three areas: (1) globalization; (2) education policy and practice (3) the social economic and political factors. The findings of the study are used to suggest the contribution of skill formation approach to the understanding of the relationship between education and the demand for and supply of skills in economic development. The findings also show the potential of skill formation in providing a way of planning education that is more responsive to the economy. In conclusion implications for future policies and practice concern with education for work are offered.

## **2.0 The historical context of education system in Kenya**

The foundation of the education system in Kenya was laid by the Christian missionaries in the 18<sup>th</sup> century mainly to serve religious purposes (Sheffield, 1973). Later the missionary aims of education were broadened to include practical skills in accordance to the demands of the colonial government (ibid). However, between the First World War and the Second World War, a racial based education system set in line with the economic needs of the colonial government was established. The Africans were to pursue 'industrial education' to prepare them to serve their white masters in subordinate position in the economy. The Europeans undertook academic education in preparation for administrative duties (ibid).

However, upon achievement of independence the government sought to change these trends by providing equal opportunity to all citizens in the country. A national education system was put in place in an effort to provide equal opportunities for all Kenyans to develop economic competencies (Republic of Kenya, 1964). It was expected that all Kenyans would be empowered through knowledge and acquisition of skills to actively participate in economic activities geared to nation building. However, the interpretation of the relationship between education and economic development seems to have been underpinned by the human capital theory (Republic of Kenya, 1964, 2003). The human capital theorists believe that knowledge and skills that increase the capital yields of human labour result from a systematic investment in learning. The underlying concept of this theory is a preposition that education and training can be regarded as investment with future material pay-offs analogous to investment in physical capital (Ashton & Green, 1996). The theory proposes unproblematic link between the stock of skills and the output of productive system (Brown, 2001). It is assumed that technical skills and knowledge automatically improve both individual and national economies (Ashton & Green, 1996).

Informed by the human capital theory, the government mobilized the communities to support expansion of education through Harambee efforts. Harambee is a Kiswahili word for corporate effort. As a result there was tremendous expansion of education opportunities in the early years of independence but with little reflection on the skills required for national economic development. For example, King (1977) observes that although the government increased opportunities for Africans in schools, many graduates of both primary and secondary education were often found to lack practical skills for economic needs in the country. This factor contributed to increased unemployment among those educated (Kivuva, 2002). To address the mismatch between education outcomes and economic needs, the government introduced vocational subjects in primary and secondary education under the 8+4+4 system of education (Mwiria, 2002, Republic of Kenya, 2003). However, there were no laid down policies to support vocational education. As a result, the schools continue to produce large numbers of graduates but often lacking skills for economic development. More recently, in the era of globalization the government has embarked on ambitious expansion of education as evidenced by the introduction of free primary education in the year 2003 and the abolition of tuition fees for secondary education. This may be interpreted as a strategy of the government to use education to improve economic development (Republic of Kenya, 2005).

Notably however, the problem of school outcomes especially in relation to the production and application of skills is embedded in the social political, historical and economic factors. The effects of historical and political factors on the outcomes of education in African countries have been well documented (Altibach, 1982, Altbach & Kelly, 1986, Cheru, 2002, Kivuva, 2002, Tikly, 2004 Okwach & Abagi). Kivuva (2002) has observed that in the early years of independence, the

national education system was programmed to focus on the production of administrators to serve the government at the expense of other economic areas. Elsewhere, Tikly (2004) has argued that the colonial form of education especially in skill development continues to influence education system in the African countries. Similarly, the bifurcation between academic and vocational education is attributed to historical factors (Crossley & Vulliamy, 1996, Green, 1990) and political factors (Young, 1998). Therefore it could be argued that education actors interpret skills for economic development from different frames of references. It is therefore important that different factors be considered when planning education aimed at equipping people with skills. So far, although education opportunities in Kenya have increased tremendously over the years, there is a growing mismatch between education outcomes and economic needs in the country. Many educated people remain unemployed, while those employed do not always produce to the maximum of their potentials. This has left many Kenyans disgruntled with national education system (Sivi-Njonjo and Mwangola, 2011).

An interest to Kenyan education stakeholders could therefore be to understand the factors that influence education outcomes. Many learners and their sponsors spent a lot of resources in education to acquire skills for economic development. However, this does not mean that the schools alone can influence the availability of jobs and the employability of the learners (Brown, et al, 2003). Job opportunities can be influenced by the prevailing economic conditions, policies, cultural factors, adoption of technological capabilities; the development of an equitable infrastructure for formal and informal enterprises and lack of commitment from the students among others (Killick, 1993, Ashton, Green, 1996, Brown et al, 2003, Cullingford, 2004, King 2011).

## **2.1 Skill formation Perspective**

The concept of skill formation has its roots in economic sociology and the new institutionalism (Brown, 2001). The theory pre-supposes that skill formation and economic performance are socially constructed and experienced within social institutions such as schools, offices and industries (Brown, p: 30). The implication is that skill formation like any other social system could be seen to comprise the interplay of individuals and institutions of agency and structures of macro and micro social processes. This means that the individual and societal interpretation of economic skills, institutional structures and the organization at work places, where skills are applied could shape the demand for and supply of skills. The theory thus, illuminates the social, political and economic factors that influence development and application of skills in the economy (Ashton & Green, 1996, Brown, 2001, Tikly et al, 2003). It provides a theoretical underpinning that could provide a platform for reflection that would enable people, individually and collectively understand their economic needs.

From this understanding, the theory of skill formation could be said to be based on several assumptions that need to be considered when planning programme that would empower people with skills for economic development. One primary assumption of the theory is that like all human activities, the meaning of being skilled and how the skills are used in the economy is shaped by the social rules (Brown, 2001). People will value certain skills and apply them in day to day activities based on the in-built assumptions of the wider set of social rules (Pawson & Tilley, 1997). For example, in communities where the society values music as professional that can earn one a living, many people may learn and apply such skills. However, in communities where music is not valued as an economic activity, people who are talented in such skills may fail to develop them.

Another key assumption of skill formation is that skill development and application has a political dimension (Ashton & Green, 1996). It is those in power positions that can support a solid education

system to foster a skill formation programme. In addition, the skills espoused by dominant groups as they comprise broader discourses linked to power and privilege can be used to influence the groups with less power in the society (Young, 1998). For example at a global level, the powerful nations through the agency of multinationals corporations such as World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) influence developing countries to emphasis certain skills. For example ICT as an internationally recognised skill for the contemporary economic development is emphasised in developing countries (Crossely & Watson, 2003). At a national level, curriculum policy is prepared by those in power position. The selection of the curriculum content though underpinned by the societal needs is often an ideological construct mediated by the understanding of those in authority (Cohen, et al, 2004). They also define what is knowledge, how accessible to different groups any knowledge is and the accepted relationships between different knowledge areas and those who possess them (Young, 1998, p: 14). Accordingly, through different policies initiated by those in power, knowledge could be stratified in two aspects; pure and applied, or academic and vocational. Similarly, through the use of different mechanisms such as user fees or examination, the government determines those who have access to ‘what’ education, hence what skills. Those in authority may also influence skill formation subtly through different ways such as regulation of the economy (Ashton & Green, 1996).

A third assumption of skill formation is that variation in contextual factors both within and among nations lead to varied skill needs (Tikly, et al, 2003, Tikly, 2004). Different economic activities are undertaken in different localities depending on factors such as climate, status of the location (whether urban or rural) or level of technological development and available resources. Issues of income distribution, opportunity and democratic participation and the ways people come together in pursuit of their individual interests and collective goals are seen to have decisive impact on national skill formation strategy (Brown, 2001, p: 31, see also King, 2005, 2011). Varied economic needs make it difficult for any standard way of resolving the problematic of skill formation (Brown, 2001). The implication is that there is need for dialogical approach in both planning and implementation of programmes that foster skill formation. Consensus on issues of skill development is highly emphasised. As Brown (2001, p: 15) observes, ‘*If people do not share a sense of involvement or commitment in what they do..., they will not use their creative powers to work effectively*’.

In general, to align the school outcome to economic needs of the country is dependant on many factors. Many students fail to realize their economic expectation from schools not only because the schools fail to offer technical skills for economic development, but because of social, cultural, political and economic factors (Abramowitz & Giroux, 1985). It would therefore be reasonable to assume that skill formation as a social activity ought to be approached from a combination rather than separate factors to be able to see things from a practical perspective.

However, many of the surveys of the role of education in economic development focus on particular aspects of the education system even if they provide an overall picture that is clear and consistent. The researchers who scrutinize the student performance for example, detect behaviours which are not in conformity with skill development. Whether, they are concerned with behaviour of the students, work or their role in the society, they keep returning to the relative unexpected outcomes in the school system. That this remains detected (unexpected outcomes) but rarely pursued, is partly because of the consistent application of theories that do not address the social political factors that influence education and partly because of approaching the study of education as a separate entity

from the rest of the society. Education is embedded in the society and much of what goes on in the society be it corruption, bad policies or cultural practices affect the outcomes. Schooling should therefore be pictured as an element of the larger society (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985). The society needs educated people to spearhead economic development.

### **3.0 Methodology**

Many factors within the society may influence education outcomes. With constant changes in the economy and with varied economic needs the issues of skill formation becomes complex. There are people who were formally employed but have been made redundant because of structural reforms. Still there are some who are skilled but have never got gainful employment because of various reasons. In addition, there are those who would like to acquire certain skills but they lack opportunity or the motivation to do so. The research therefore adopted a qualitative approach and relied on lengthy semi-structured face to face interviews of between 30 minutes and 1 hour with selected interested stakeholders in education and one focus group interview with school teachers in one school.

There were in all, 29 face to face interviews and one focus group interview all which covered the same ground. The sample of the participants was drawn from five schools from four different districts in the former Rift Valley Province. Rift Valley was the largest province in Kenya. It comprised of 25 districts with varying climatic conditions and a range of social economic circumstances and towns which were deemed to be typical in the country. (The province has since been divided in several counties under the new system of government as per the new constitution of Kenya, 2010) The interviewees were mainly teachers, provincial education administrators, parents and an employer. The sample also comprised of policymakers at the national level and one employer in Nairobi (capital city of Kenya). The selection of the sample was informed by the critical theory that locates knowledge in the material lives of actors (Mittleman, 2004). Critical discourse analysis (CDA) was used to analyze the interview data collected. The choice of CDA was informed by conceptualization of the role of language in a social system as advanced by Norman Fairclough 2001. Fairclough sees CDA as an interdisciplinary approach that opens dialogue between disciplines concerned with theorising and researching social processes and social change. In this study an attempt was made to create dialogue among stakeholders in education through analyzing the perceptions and experiences of different education actors at different levels. Confidentiality and anonymity were assured.

### **4.0 The findings**

Most of the participants held the conception that different factor shape the skills that are produced in education institutions. The understanding that global factors, education policy (practice and implementation), and social political and economic factors shape skill formation were pervasive in the reflection of most of the interviewees.

#### **4.1 Globalization**

Among the views presented was that there are many changes taking place in the world of work as a result of globalization (global integration) that have significant effect on skill formation. Globalization has brought about many opportunities through export trade, thus raising demand for skills in areas such as horticulture. Some interviewees also argued that from its competitive strategy, global competition motivates people to acquire high skills to improve the quality of their products, to be able to compete effectively. For example, when asked how globalization affects economic development in Kenya, the participants had this to say;

.....I think it has good opportunities, because we can export items like horticulture, beans and they also bring their things here. I think it has improved our economy, especially the small scale farmers who grow fruits, flowers and French beans. Those farmers have livelihood through that market and it is very promising if they sell their goods abroad and they don't complain that they are not being paid, because it is a reliable market (Teacher, (1) SCH. C).

I think it is good because it gives the consumer a choice and when there is competition as a result of giving them a choice, then everyone has to improve on the quality so the consumer becomes top priority in planning and production which increases demand in high skills for production (Employer firm A).

However, it has been argued that different people have different conceptions about globalization and that the effects of globalization are contradictory (Crossely & Watson, 2003, Smith, 2003). Nothing could be more illustrative than the contradictions of the effects of globalization on skill development as expressed in the extracts below;

..... at harvesting time, you find buyers come with different prices and they buy as they want. .. a small scale farmer cannot get access to where there are good prices, because of lack of transport ... those who are able move in the interior of the rural areas to exploit the farmers who cannot afford to transport their grains to places like KFC where you could get a fair price, at the same time you may not even have storage facilities so you are just compelled to sell at a throw away price. We can't grow food to sell because we are losing (Parent 1).

those who are accessing the benefits are not many. More people have lost in terms of employment. Agriculture collapsed because of these cheaper products from outside, so many people lost a means of livelihood. ..Today the market is very unpredictable you may grow - buy the inputs and spent so much, but when it comes to selling, the price is so low. (Parent 1).

Although the competitive nature of the global market presents opportunities for improving quality, neoliberal policy of free market economy presents a challenge that affects skill formation. According to (Balwanz, 2012), informal and casual workers generally do not benefit from the rights and social protection available to formal sector workers, therefore skills for informal sector are not attractive to the youth

#### **4.2 Education policy and implementation**

Although it seemed clear that the changes in the economy were contradictory and that there was high likelihood that people could interpret skills needed for economic development differently, the participants perceived that the policymakers were not receptive to the views of other education stakeholders. A general perception that education development was heavily influenced by political factors was a resonant theme among those interviewed in this research.

... the changes from the old system to the 8+4+4 and all others, are like they are initiated politically...and the public is not allowed to analyze and see how it can be made relevant ...So I think it was a wrong approach. It meant that it is a top-down process, sometimes it does not work, and the fact that human beings will be naturally resistant to change, the system was not accepted (Principal, C)

The relationship between education policy and the politics of the land are rarely discussed by educationist save for matters related to financing the school system. Yet in this research it dominates the negative picture of education policy. In many cases the policymakers failed to approach educational issues critically because they wanted to fit in the schemes of the politicians to

save their jobs. Policy decisions made were in tune with the political leadership rather than the national education needs.

Our problem in this country is that we have tended to rely more on 'political singing'. We tend to go by what our politicians say or want. Policymakers rarely critically analyse the benefits of the policies to the learners. It is all politics, (Administrator 2)

Although the importance of research in informing policy is acknowledged by many scholars as well as policymakers, the power of politics in Kenya was seen to override the use of research in education development. This was perceived to be a great challenge in skill formation.

You see we may conduct a research and come up with findings and the government can ignore the findings. Because we have policymakers, if policies were made depending on research findings, then that is when research would be important. But in education, for example in the last three years we have been providing Free Primary Education (FPE) was it based on research, no, it was based on policy decisions. You see Kenya is a political country as opposed to developed countries. The politicians will come up with policies to suit their forms of government (Senior Practitioner 1).

Tension between the local and global policy in education development was also clear, but it is the perception that the government was more receptive to ideas from the external sources than from the stakeholders in the country that was seen to have a significant negative effect on skill formation.

We haven't tapped the intellectual resources in the country to the maximum. We tend to rely more on information from developed countries than our own people. So many trips are made by government officials on what they describe as learning. We as locals are not given the opportunity and if they do it is the few people at the top not people at the grass roots, so we are left out we cannot grow when we do not have confidence on ourselves. Many Kenyans are educated and exposed. We should be given opportunity (FT 2).

Education is thought to be the route to individual and societal development (White 2004). It is therefore, supposed to be responsive to the changes and evolving to meet the prevailing needs of the economy. However, the picture of education in Kenya was portrayed from the sense of the past with learners fixated on traditional secure job opportunities in the formal sector.

Actually what brain washed us for some time was that there was emphasis on this senior courses in the university; medicine, teaching and , engineering,.. that was what was emphasized and I think the kids when they fail to get those courses they feel like they are failures or they are completely hopeless. So there were no linking alternatives that if you don't get this then you can land in this. I think the whole country overemphasized those courses and yet they were not attainable, so most of the learners get lost in between so that if you ask them to join some courses... they see us very miserable people ( Parent sch C).

If the society viewed academic certificates to be more superior to acquisition of competencies then to conform to the demands the policymakers, the implementers are conditioned to conform to the demands. One way in which the teachers conform to the demands of the society is to concentrate on teaching learners how to pass examinations rather than education for acquisition of competencies.

..... the emphasis that has been put on examination and this has affected the manner in which people teach and learn. Because now teachers are teaching for the students to pass but not necessarily to value the knowledge that they get so you may find that there is plenty of drilling. This kind of teaching does not encourage development of skills needed for job (Teacher (2) SCH C)

### **4.3 Social political issues and skill formation**

The participants also felt that other social political issues could offer explanation for the problem of skill formation. The views that secondary education was highly stratified in a way that challenged



the provision of equal opportunities in skill formation were dominant in the views of the interviewees. Not all secondary school age learners had access to secondary education

First of all there is no equal opportunity to get the KCPE certificate to get a child to a secondary school because of regional inequalities. A child who is in Nairobi city with well established schools with qualified teachers is competing with a child in North Eastern Kenya where there is so much insecurity that these children do not even always attend school; Their schools have no basic facilities for learning. ... or a child in a rural village in Koibatek with poorly equipped schools. Yet these children are expected to do the same curriculum and compete for the same opportunities in secondary education. ....our system is not fair. (Teacher, (1) SCH B).

The selection does not offer equal accessibility to secondary education and in my view it increases inequality in the society. Those who are economically able take their children to private schools. The children are drilled on examination related questions which makes them to get high scores to join the best schools in the country. Yet those with high abilities from the poor families are left in the poor schools with no facilities so they never get anywhere (Principal SCH C)

According to Balwanz, 2012 historical inequalities and unequal power on access to employment and other social goods affects development and application of skills

A further negative effect on skill formation was seen in the application of skills. Education is supposed to enhance practical application of skills at work. However, it was perceived that the education system does not encourage practical work perhaps because of historical factors.

There is very little innovative research going on in this country. That is why you wonder! .....even agriculture where we have so many trained people, why can't we produce enough food for ourselves ... and there is enough land. And we have trained people, but the people are just there to earn a salary... because that is what they were trained for... they have the knowledge but they don't value using it on the ground... (Principal, SCH D).

If practical work was not encouraged then it is unlikely that high productivity is valued. To this, end recruitment of employees is not based on merit. This leaves room for other criteria to be used in employment that do not encourage skill formation.

there isn't equal opportunity for those qualified because of the inequalities in the society. The job market is very competitive and because of the competition, the selection is not fair. I am saying this because the selection is not open. Although not always, it is not a secret that people are recruited in different government jobs e.g. teacher training, police force or Armed Forces based on how much they can pay as bribery. People have to pay up to shillings 30, 000- 50,000 thousand or more to get recruited ... It is also true that the politicians employ their own relatives and tribes men in public jobs even if they are not qualified...it is a well known fact in Kenya and even the media has been reporting on this (Parent, 2),

In general the views of the participants show that there have been major changes in the economy and globalization has many challenges but also opportunities that could be exploited. However, many internal factors combine with the challenges from globalization to shape the production and application of skills thus influencing school outcomes.

## **5.0 Discussion**

This study demonstrates the potential contribution of skill formation perspective to our understanding of the factors that shape demand for and supply of skills for economic development in Kenya and perhaps in other developing countries. The construct of skill formation illuminates on various social political and economic factors that influence both the production and application of

skills. Some of the factors reflected in the perceptions and experiences of the participants demonstrate structural constraints that are associated with the changes in the global economy. For example, loss of jobs as a result of loss of market for some agricultural products and availability of market for non traditional crops are factors that are linked to economic globalization. Globalization has brought about changes in the economy that are contradictory, affecting people differently. The challenges of globalization in the Kenyan economy are heightened by the combined effects of the national contextual factors as reflected in high cost of production due to importation of farm inputs perhaps as a result of lack of capacity in manufacturing, taxation and corruption and unequal opportunities.

In relation to the education system, the findings suggest that a variety of factors (both educational and extra education) may individually or collectively interact to shape the school outcomes. For example, the focus on teaching for examination directly shapes which kind of knowledge and skills the learners are equipped with. On the other hand poor infrastructure in some schools limits the efforts of teachers and the students to develop desired skills for economic development. Similarly, examinational barriers and approach used for students' selection deny many students opportunity to access secondary education. The school outcomes are further influenced by the mode of selection and placement in the labour market. In particular, lack of meritocracy in the labour market discourages people from investing in skills. For example, is it the capability to perform work or the capability to pay for the jobs that determines who gets employed? Such controversies may send mixed messages to students thus affecting the way they engage in their learning.

More generally, the findings suggest that skills and employability do not share a linear relationship. Not all people who have skills are employed in Kenya. This demonstrates that employability of a person is not exclusively determined by having skills and knowledge to do the work (Ashton & Green, 1996, Brown et al 2003, Balwanz, 2012). Moreover, having a skilled manpower in a country does not mean that the economy will grow automatically. People may have skills but fail to apply them because of factors such as lack of market, social, corruption and unequal distribution of resources. Skill development in Kenya seems to be influenced by social political and economic conditions. This finding brings into question the assumptions made about the relationship between education and the labour market in Kenya. For example, do human capital assumptions on which education policies are premised offer an adequate framework for policy formation and analysis?

In education policymaking and implementation the findings suggest a need for policies that are more nationalistic than individual political aspirations. The 'political singing' as describe by one of the participants, failure to use research in policy decision making and top-down approaches to policies without blending them with bottom-up ideas are impediments to education development. Dialogical approach to education programmes that support skill formation is therefore proposed. This view extends to policy borrowing and copying. Whereas, globalization encourages knowledge sharing, various scholars have cautioned against uncritical policymaking borrowing (Dale, 1999, Crossley & Watson 2003). From the data there was a perception that Kenya has failed to eradicate poverty because of failure of incorporating ideas of other stakeholders in policymaking process. A key factor is therefore, how national policymakers in Kenya can relate with other stakeholders (especially the professionals) in education within the country and the international players to develop an education system that could foster skill formation in response to the national economic needs. Crossley et al, (2005) have proposed participatory and collaborative approach to knowledge sharing in economic globalization. Similarly, Brown (2001) has argued that skill formation programmes will succeed through building consensus with other stakeholders. Perhaps these are

ideas worth exploring if Kenya has to align its education system with economic needs in the country.

The data also show that social political factors such as identity significantly shape skill formation for economic development. This is reflected in what is perceived as the preference of academic education over vocational skills. Students tend to limit the knowledge and skills they acquire to what they think are appropriate in the labour market. They work hard in academic education because academic certificates are highly valued in job market. They apply for jobs in the formal sector that are seen to be well paying, prestigious in the society and seem to be protected from unfair competition (see Omolo 2010). In addition, the formal sector has better returns as compared to the informal sector. To respond to the societal demands, the planners and implementers of education emphasis knowledge and skill areas that lead students to academic qualification irrespective of their value in development of the students. The fact that this pattern of thinking is rooted in the society shows the powerful impact of social construction in school outcomes.

In the same vein, the overemphasis on examination is perceived to be motivated by the uncritical use of exam certificates in job placement. The increasing employer demands for academic qualification cannot be explained solely in terms of the labour market interests. Some scholars have argued that demand for certificates may be seen as desire to create a myth of meritocracy in a society that is highly uneven (Dale, 2000). The clamour for education to create certificates in all fields facilitates the formation of privileged stratum in the society and monopolizes economic position (Brown et al, 2003). The question that needs to be asked is whether focussing on examination certificates promotes development of individual competencies or is used as a smokescreen of unevenness in the society.

The mismatch between education outcomes and the labour market is also reflected in what was described as lack of valuing the skills 'acquired'. '*People do not put to use the knowledge they have*', '*why are we not utilizing the skills we have?* This revelation raises a lot of concern because without application of skills to their full value, the economy cannot grow. This means that the economy cannot absorb all learners who leave school ready to enter job market. Hence there is need to analyse factors that make people not utilize the skills they have. For example, is it because people buy their way to employment, the rewarding system or the historical factors? This is because while schools and other training institution may enhance skill acquisition, they have no control on how those trained in various field may use them (Cullingford, 2004). The findings of this study therefore show that there is need to incorporate societal factors when thinking about school programmes that focus on skill formation for economic development.

Clearly the conceptualization of skill formation among the education stakeholders who took part in this research were influenced by multiple factors that were in-built in the society. While education plays a crucial role to facilitate development of skills for economic development, the outcomes are not only reinforced but are also challenged by the concrete experiences within the society. Thus educational role in economic development may be interpreted and mediated, by among other things, personal experience, political factors, historical factors or the changing material condition in the society. It is for this reason that it seems necessary to conceptualize skill formation in a broader perspective.

Moreover, further research is obviously needed to more fully investigate the social political and economic factors that shape skill formation in Kenya. Additionally, scholarship is also needed to determine the effectiveness of skill formation approach as a conceptual framework for enhancing educational policy and practice.

The task of the policymakers in education for a globalized economy in Kenya is therefore to work with other government departments to structure education reforms alongside other social institutions. They need to take into account the employment opportunities in the informal sector hence institute structural changes that can be attractive to the youth in the country.

For practical purposes, the policymakers and curriculum implementers need to take into account that students are future workers and need to be involved in practical learning. For this reason there is need for a more practical approach to learning/teaching. The policymakers' task should be to develop education programs that encourage learner participation. Work experience could probably be infused in the school programme to provide opportunities for students to participate in practical work. On the other hand, the teachers' task in such a program would be to guide the learners to develop skills in critical thinking to be able to reflect on their own lived experiences drawing on the general economic trends in the country. The goal could be to enable them to develop ways of learning that would be useful for acquiring skills that could be applied directly to their own experiences. However, for this to be realized students need to be given equal opportunities to access learning. This could be achieved through planning a curriculum that is sensitive to the needs of the students and provision of learning facilities for all students. They also need social and economic motivation through seeing that those who have competences are rewarded for their efforts and are given equal opportunities in economic development irrespective of their social status. In a nut shell there is need to consider a collective approach to knowledge production and skill acquisition (see, Young, 1998).

## 6.0 Conclusion

The research shows that the overall education outcomes are not shaped exclusively by factors within the school. Social, political, economic and historical factors influence skill formation. The social political and economic factors need to be addressed and economic policies reformed along side changes in education to influence positive outcomes. More importantly, the findings in this research lend support to those who argue that skill formation is a social activity and inquiry in the problematic of skill formation ought to take into account the inbuilt social factors (Ashton & Green, 1996 Brown, 2001, Tikly, 2004). Education policymakers thus need to work collaboratively with all stakeholders to succeed in aligning education with economic needs of the country.

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